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INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ADVANCED RESEARCH (IJAR)

Article DOI: 10.21474/IJAR01/20328

DOI URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.21474/IJAR01/20328>



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LANGUAGE AS A TOOL FOR DEFINING GENERATIONS: A STUDY ON GEN-Z LINGO

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Manuscript Info

Manuscript History

Received: 27 November 2024

Final Accepted: 30 December 2024

Published: January 2025

Key words:-

Language, Generational Identity, Gen-Z, Jargons

Abstract

This study aimed at exploring the relationship between the language in practice and the generational identity, based on the use of generation-specific jargon in a specific generation of bilingual participants. 'Language and identity' is a prominent subject matter in linguistic studies. The core objective of this paper was to establish language as a metaphor for generation or to examine the fluidity of language with the course of time. It also attempted to break down the conventional idea of defining generation through biological age, rather held generation as a relative term depending on the linguistic behavior in the relevant contexts. The researcher intended to find out the significant factors behind such variations by adopting a mixed research methodology. Finally, the study made an attempt to answer the research question and thus fulfil the research objective of the study. The findings of the study suggested that there are generation specific jargons that help the people of Generation-Z to establish their generational identity.

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Introduction:-

Language goes through changes from time to time, from generation to generation. The conventional linguistic behavior of one generation might seem unintelligible to an older generation and irrelevant to the next one.

In modern media and research, Generation Z are those born between 1997 and 2010. Generation Z developed its own slang words and expressions out of phrases and acronyms that help them align with their peers. They commonly use abbreviations and expressions which are exclusive to the people of their age or among their friend groups. Moreover, they use variety of words that can sometimes be considered incorrect or sound obscure to the people of older generations.

The Internet, social media, and networks were constantly a part of their lives from the beginning, so gen-z learnt these jargons naturally and almost unintentionally. They are adopting these Net Lingo in their virtual as well as real life conversation. It may include the introduction of new words or using the old words with new connotations. The researcher of this paper is interested in marking the jargons specific to these generation and examine whether the users' physical age align with their generational language.

Statement of the problem

As language and identity is fluid, we cannot strictly constrict it within the boundary of our age. As we learn a language, we accommodate to the variations in our own way which exclusively depends on the particular person and his/her social context. Generational identity is a subjective variable. So, marking generation by biological age is a

wrong approach which may in fact differ from the generation a person identifies him/herself as belonging to through the use of language. This study seeks to explore whether language is uniquely identifiable in a certain generation and if it can determine the generational identity of a person.

Rationale

The relation between the process of ageing and the use of language has conventionally been scrutinized from two perspectives: the variety of language used during the lifespan of an individual, and the change of the language in practice within the same speech community. Age-specific use of language falls under the first category, while generation-specific use of language is reserved for the latter. Studies have found that individuals tend to preserve their speech patterns as they move through their lifespan, and the study of Generation-specific language necessarily involves the study of language change. This study has explored the shift of language itself in regard to specific generation and how it helps them to express their identity.

Limitation of the Study:-

Because of the time limitation, this study only sampled a part of the Gen-Z population. It is mainly focused on the young adults of tertiary level. Although the generation-marker jargon is identifiable most of the time, it is not utterly rigid. Based on the differences in the social context of the bilingual speaker, these markers may or may not appear.

Objectives of the Study:-

The general objective of the study is-

1. To explore the linguistic pattern of gen-Z for identifying how they negotiate their generational identity through it.

Specific objectives of this study are:

1. To explore generation specific linguistic pattern, vocabularies and jargons of gen-Z.
2. To seek the reason behind the usage of this specific linguistic pattern.
3. To analyze how they negotiate their identity as one specific generation through the use of their linguistic pattern.

Review of the Relevant Literatures:-

A phenomenological survey on 120 MA students in Pakistan was conducted by Saima Maqbool et al to investigate the Gen Z ESL learners' language learning strategies as digital natives. The collected data revealed that Gen Z are more enthusiastic about using digital strategies proving that Gen Z truly are digital natives benefiting from learning strategies such as multitasking; using technology; graphic communication; gratifications & rewards. The digital technology has been proven to be important attribute of Gen Z as is proven by the researchers. As Schwartz and Merten (1967) state, "Youth culture consists of those adolescent norms, standards, and values which are discussed in a language particularly intelligible to members of this age-grade" (319). Gumperz and CookGumperz (1982) have also maintained that "social identity and ethnicity are in large part established and maintained through language".

Research on youth language has explored the difficulty of maintaining the distinction between age-exclusive and age-preferential use of language. Androutsopoulos (1998) provides an integrative overview of variationist research on age-preferential phonological and morpho-syntactic features, research on crossing (Rampton 1995) and other discourse strategies, and traditional slang and argot studies. He argues that these usages all function as social markers of 'youth' and that they should therefore be conceptualized as complementary aspects of the same phenomenon. A further significant outcome of the focus on youth language has been the recognition of the important role of adolescents in language change, especially in the features that may originate in slang vocabulary. Coupland and his colleagues treat contextual age in much the same way as social age (Coupland 1997, 34). A different example of generation-specific language comes from the research of Dubois and Horvath (1999) where they point out that, age as a measure of an individual's chronological development was not what was important; instead, age "is fundamentally important to identify the generations within the speech community affected by important historical events.

Since adolescents as a group is most prominent in terms of generating slang, youth culture is an especially feasible area to study slang. Hertzler (1965, 307) identifies "exalting or lampooning persons and events" one of the reasons

for slang use and Harman (1985, 2) as an "Acceptable deviance" for group members who display thereby an appropriate level of being in fashion.

Research Gap

So far, many studies have been conducted on the arena of language and identity and some of them have also addressed the generation specific use of language. But the identity negotiation process through the use of language in the bilingual context of Bangladesh has not been addressed yet. Therefore, the current study can be considered an original one based on the given context.

Methodology:-

Based on the research objectives and aims, mixed method is selected for this study. In order to accomplish this objective, a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods is utilized to gather pertinent data. The "Primary data" was collected through participant responses. Their response was recorded and considered as the foundation of this study. Secondary data is collected from the previous studies relevant to the subject matter. A list of 50 Jargons collected from internet sources is used to measure the response of the participants.

Several tools and techniques were utilized by the researcher to collect the data. The qualitative data was collected from the recordings of the in-depth personal interviews of the prominent jargon users. The quantitative data was collected from the survey. A Questionnaire containing 8 questions and 8 interview questions was used to measure the use of jargons among the gen-z.

Tables and charts are used to present the collected response from the participants. The researcher has used the auto-generated charts from "Google Forms" to present the quantitative data.

Data collected from the survey are statistically analyzed with the descriptive analysis of the data gained from the interviews. The presented data would numerically show the variation in response among the participants. The research would generate rich, detailed research materials that would leave individuals' perspectives intact as well as provide multiple contexts for understanding the phenomenon under study. It also has a wider range of data based on interviews.

Sample

As young adults and adults are most innovative in their linguistic behavior, this study is focused on the early gen-z population. Respondents were initially selected randomly for the study using stratified method. Later, purposive method was adopted by the researcher to gain the deeper insight from fewer number of participants. Firstly, 120 participants were randomly picked from tertiary level of Gen-Z population. 50 participants from public university, 50 students from private university and 20 students from national university were the primary sample. The most prominent Jargon users among the respondents were identified and three respondents from each category were interviewed.

Data Analysis and Discussion:-

Data collected from Survey

The questionnaire contains 8 questions that are posed to explore the use of the selected jargons among the participants, the frequency of using those jargons, their motive behind it and their generational identity.

Age Group

The questionnaire was circulated among the tertiary students of different institutions. The first question verifies that all the participants belong to Gen-Z and their birth year ranges from 1997 to 2010.

Tertiary Institution Category

The respondents were tertiary level students of public, private and national university of Bangladesh. 50 students from public university, 50 students from private university and 20 students from national university filled the questionnaire.

Use of Jargons

50 jargons were listed in the questionnaire and the respondents were asked to choose yes or no on the basis of their use of that specific jargon in everyday conversation with the Gen-Z intended meaning. All of the words were used by some of the respondents.

The table below shows the number of usages of specific jargons by the respondents:

Serial	Jargons	Intended Meaning	User	Non-user
1.	Boomer	Backdated	67	53
2.	Sus	Suspicious	50	70
3.	Cringe	To feel disgust or embarrassment	106	14
4.	Vibe	Pleasing ambience	106	14
5.	TBH	To be honest	92	28
6.	NGL	Not gonna lie	75	45
7.	FR	For real	59	61
8.	AF	As fuck (extreme)	77	43
9.	Simp	Overtly submissive courtier	76	44
10.	Chad	Popular & confident young male	48	72
11.	IRL	In real life	50	70
12.	High- key; Low-key	Intense; moderate	73	47
13.	Periodt	Period or end of statement	54	66
14.	No cap	Not lying	56	64
15.	Smol	Small	66	54
16.	Woke	Politically and socially aware	57	63
17.	Hits Different	Special	91	29
18.	Living rent free	Obsessive thought	65	55
19.	Fam	Friend	77	43
20.	E-boy/E- girl	Internet personality	66	54
21.	Ghosting	Ceasing communication	90	30
22.	Yikes	Shock or extreme surprise	54	66
23.	IYKYK	If you know you know	51	69
24.	FML	Fuck my life (expression of disappointment)	51	69
25.	Big brain	Mocking stupidity	94	26
26.	Stan	Fan	56	64
27.	I can't even	Shocked or overwhelmed	92	28
28.	I'm dead	Considering something extremely funny	97	23
29.	Tea	Gossip	86	34
30.	Basic	Someone who prefers mainstream products, trends, music etc.	88	32
31.	Snack	An attractive person	70	50
32.	SMH	Shaking my head	45	75
33.	TF	The fuck	83	37
34.	Thirsty	Someone desperate	87	33
35.	Slay	Doing something spectacularly	86	34
36.	DM	Direct message	89	31
37.	Salty	Unreasonably annoyed person	66	54
38.	Throw shade	Disrespectful manner	50	70
39.	Pick me boy/girl	A person who seeks fe/male validation by acting different than the rest	50	70
40.	Yas	Yes	59	61
41.	FFS	For fuck's sake	36	84
42.	WTF	What the fuck	102	18

43.	Dank	Edgy	48	72
44.	FTW	For the win	86	34
45.	Gotcha/ Gotchu	Got you	78	42
46.	RN	Right now	78	42
47.	Deadass	Serious	64	56
48.	Yeet	An exclamation of excitement	40	80
49.	Drip	Style	44	76
50.	Cancel	Thrusting out of social circle	68	52

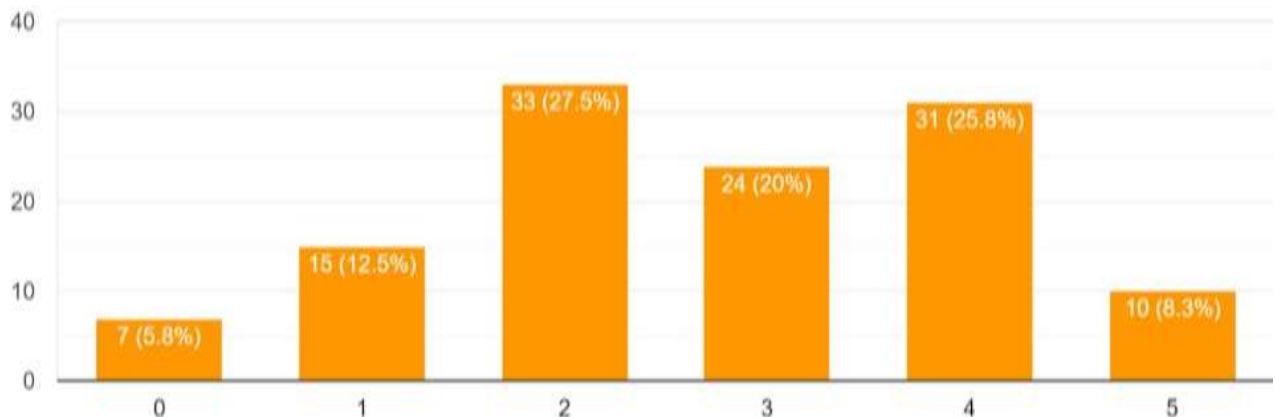
The response shows that every jargon is used by a big portion of the respondents. project their sense of identity ipants from the national university rarelyused Gen-Z jargon.The finding suggests that the urban youth of Gen-Z is the most prominent user category.

Frequency of Using Jargons

The respondents were asked in a scale of 0 to 5 how frequently they use the jargons in their daily life conversation.

In a scale of 1 to 5, how frequently do you use the aforementioned expressions? (0.Never 1. Hardly, 2.Sometimes, 3.often, 4.most often, 5.Always)

120 responses



Highest number of respondents marked themselves as moderate user of jargons. 33 students use Gen-Z jargons “sometimes”, while 31 students use it “most often” which is the second highest category. 24 students use the jargons often, 15 students use it rarely and 7 participants do not use these jargons at all in their everyday conversation.

Motif behind Using Jargons

The respondents were asked to checkmark or add the reason/s behind using the jargons. They were provided with four options- to catch up with their generation, to sound like native English speakers, by being influenced by other users and to be relevant to the contemporary trends. They also had the option to add more reasons as they saw fit. The respondents were allowed to choose more than one option in this segment.

Most of the respondents claimed that they use these jargons to catch up with their generation. Next closest category is “to be relevant to the contemporary trend”, 41 students chose this option as their motive. 41 students marked the influence of others as a factor behind using jargons.21 students responded that they use jargon to sound like native English speakers. 21 students stated other reasons. Some of them include- to save the time, to make the conversation easy and spontaneous and some even claimed that the jargons come naturally to them while they engage in a conversation.

Generational Identity

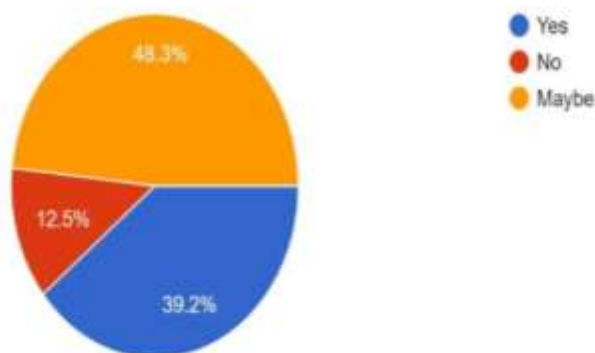
The respondents were asked whether or not they consider themselves as a part of Gen-Z.

51 students hesitantly responded that they consider them as a part of Gen-Z, while 39 students were confident about it. On the other hand, 30 students refused to identify themselves as a part of Gen-Z.

Language and Identity

The respondents were finally asked to give their opinion on whether or not they believed that language and generational identity are interdependent.

Do you believe that you can align with a group or generation through the specific use of language?
120 responses



58 students considered that language may or may not help to mark generation, while 47 students firmly believed that they can align with a specific generation through the use of jargons. Only 15 students responded negatively to this question.

Data Collected from the Interview

Public University Respondents from Urban Region

Respondent-1, an undergrad student of a public university, whose birth year is 1999, identified herself as an active and regular user of Gen-Z jargons. She got introduced to these jargons mostly through social media and “meme culture”, which again is an arena dominated by Gen-Z. Whenever she comes across an unfamiliar jargon, she searches it on “urban dictionary” which provides the connotation of the word. She uses these expressions both in her real-life conversation and in social media. She furthermore added that these jargons are exclusive the people of her age and they are the ones who understand and actively use these expressions. These expressions are used by this respondent most often with a motif to be relevant to the contemporary trend. She also considered herself as a part of Gen-Z. However, she believes that these jargons are not necessarily the only but one of the important markers of her generational identity.

Respondent-2, also an undergrad student of public university, who was born in 1999, identified herself as Gen-Z and uses almost every expression mentioned in the table. Her use of jargon is prominent but not limited to social media conversation. She uses these expressions with the people who belong to her age group, with a few exceptions. These expressions make the conversation easier for her and help her to align with her peer group in terms of using language. The use of similar jargons creates an ethno-linguistic unity among them. She considers these jargons as an important marker of generational identity.

Respondent-3, born in 1997, also an undergrad student of a public university was identified as a prominent jargon user. She uses most of the jargons mentioned in the table, mostly in her social media and among her peers in informal settings. She claimed that these expressions are exclusive to her age group and are not used by older people. The use of jargons makes the conversation more interesting in her opinion. According to her, the idea of generation consists much more than the linguistic behavior, but language, however, works as a marker for generational identity. The respondent affirms that she is not a “boomer” in terms of her use of language, although her thoughts and likings are old school or backdated in most of the cases. It signals that her generational identity does not align with her linguistic behavior. The jargons help her to align with the people of her age although she does not align with them in most other cases. She is influenced by her peers to blend better with them. Being a

bilingual person, she also gets influenced by internet, as these jargons are globally used among the people of her generation.

Private University Respondents from Urban Region

The first interviewee from a private university was also a prominent user of Gen-Z jargon. His birth year is 1998 and he identifies himself as belonging to Gen-Z. Although he preferred using these expressions in his social media conversation, he sometimes uses these jargons in real life conversation as well. This respondent believes that these jargons are meant for making the conversation easier. He states that he does not use these expressions with anyone who does not belong to his same generation and in formal settings. He also opined that every generation and community have specific jargons and so does Gen-Z. This respondent was introduced to these words through social media and he expresses that his motif behind using such expressions is “not to sound like an uncle”, which signals the desire to establish an identity that is parallel to his age group.

Another prominent jargon user, an undergrad student of a private university, was interviewed who was born in 2000. This participant is a regular user of all the jargons listed. When he was asked about the motif of using these jargons, he replied that “it sounds cool”. The idea of sounding cool is associated with behaving in a certain way that makes someone look very up to date and helps in gaining validation from the peer group. This participant claims that the western culture through entertainment and social medias influenced him to adopt these words in his linguistic pattern. According to this respondent, these jargons are an exclusive feature limited within the Gen-Z and one cannot use these expressions with people outside this age group. Gen-Z jargons help him to establish his generational identity and communicate better with his peer groups. It also provides a sense of solidarity in terms of using language or speaking in the same manner.

The last interviewee from private university was born in 2000. He attested to be using Gen-Z jargons in a regular basis, especially in his social media conversation. However, this is constricted in his age group. According to him, these expressions help him to align better with the people of his age and make the conversation more meaningful. This participant stated that the use of these jargons makes him get acceptance from peers. He also asserts that these words are mostly learnt from his peers and this is how they share a common linguistic pattern to establish a unique generational identity.

National University Respondents from Rural Region

The first respondent was a student of a national university, situated in a rural region. She was born in 1999 and used a few of the jargons in her social media conversation. These words were exposed to her through social media. She was not familiar with most of the words mentioned in the questionnaire. She felt deviated from the people of her age group because of not using the jargons as fluently as them. She recognizes that the use of these jargons makes the conversation sounder and more natural which is exclusively held within the same age group. She further asserted, if she had used Gen-Z jargons more frequently, it would have helped her to align more with her generation. It creates intimacy, friendliness and unity among the people of same generation.

The second respondent was also a student of the national university located in a Bangladeshi village. She was born in 1999. She hardly used the jargons mentioned in the questionnaire in her everyday life, although she was familiar with most of the expressions and was able to decode the implied meaning. She only uses these words hardly in social media with her peer group. She points out that she interacted with the people belonging to the age group of Gen-Z less frequently, which resulted in her deviation from showing the linguistic behavior expected of her. She mentioned that the jargons are used by her whenever she gets the opportunity to engage in conversation with young adults aging below 25. The use of jargons makes it easier to connect with the people of her age. However, she held her circumstance and surrounding responsible for her difference with the other people of her age group. According to her, these generation-specific jargon does not only help to align with the people of one's immediate surroundings, but also connects the global population of the same generation. It makes them the part of the same generation and unified speech community.

The last interviewee was also a student of the national university, situated in a rural region. She was born in 1999. She sometimes used few of the mentioned jargons within her peer groups. She claimed to have not use these expressions with the elderly people. These expressions are considered informal and only for using with friends and peers of the same age group, according to this respondent. She did not, however, feel inferior to the active user of jargons or feel deviated from her generational identity.

Findings

The findings after analyzing the data collected from the questionnaire and the interviews suggest that there is an identifiable pattern in the use of language among the Gen-Z. They prefer using acronyms and informal words in their casual conversation. There are many words that are commonly used by them very frequently with the same manner. The use of these jargons is strictly exclusive among the population of Gen-Z. The data collected from the respondents show that they do not use these expressions with the people outside their age group. The participants of this study identify themselves as Gen-Z through the use of Gen-Z jargons which are intelligible and practiced only by this generation. Hence, language is claimed to have significant impact on shaping the generational identity of the respondents. Using these jargons helps them to establish their identity as a part of this specific generation. The participants have mentioned a few reasons for using these expressions. One of the most common reasons was to align with their peer group. Some of them were also influenced by the global pattern of the language used by the young adults to project themselves as trendy or relevant. Generational jargons are believed to be globally similar for the bilingual speaker of English, as well as the natives. However, socio economic structure determines the possibility and frequency of using jargons. Respondents from the urban area are the most active users of the Gen-Z jargons as opposed to the participants from rural regions. Finally, it can be presumed that the use of language and generational identity are interdependent.

Recommendation:-

The help of social Medias and entertainment platforms are seen to have positive impact on the respondents in learning Gen-Z jargons. Hence, being digital natives, it can be recommended that the purposive use of these mediums can be useful for Gen-Z in learning the language pattern that is deemed convenient for them to use in informal situation for more successful communication.

Conclusion:-

The use of language has a significant impact on how individuals project their identity. The ethno-linguistic unity among the people of same age influences them to use the similar bunch of words which they adopt through the process of acculturation in the bilingual context. There are specific jargons that the young adult of Bangladesh uses and it works as an identity marker of generation-Z or popularly known as Gen-Z.

Conflict of Interest:

No conflict of interest.

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